

Tickers

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Summary: a pre-Hlots Pembleton runs into a pre-Oz Adebisi

Tickers

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They sit across a table from each other.

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Throats tight, temples throbbing, hearts thudding and nerves taut.  
But they act serene. Controlled. Nonchalant even.

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With even one quick glance, the similarities and differences are at once astounding. Frank's Lieutenant peers through the large glass wall watching the two men leaning into each other and thinks that somehow, to someone, they must be some sort of study in "something." He doesn't know what. It's very vague to him, it's not even really a cognizant thought, just something nagging the back reaches of his mind. He feels guilty for thinking it, so he pushes it away instead of dwelling on it. But he keeps looking anyhow. Watching.

Two men. Nearly of equal height. Similar builds, neither stocky nor lanky. Instead, they are both solid. Neither sports any sort of mane upon their skulls, only the sheen of dark brown skin is there instead of a "crowning glory." That skin, nearly the same hue on both of them too. It's a dark umber, seemingly burnished with the slightest shine to it. Not greasy, mind you, but not dull and flat either. Leaning in, even their postures are a mirror of the other. Straight spines and high held broad shoulders, not even a hint of deference in either

one. And they sit there sizing the other one up, trying to peer into the uncharted, yet occasionally navigable currents of the other's psyche. Trying to get an edge. Their eyes flitted rapidly at first, from head to toe, searching, waiting for any sign of weakness or fear. Finding none, they both settled on the windows that are supposed to be gateways to the "soul, or heart.

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Waiting for the other to blink, to look away, the smallest indicator of an early victory, neither of them willing to allow the other that first critical move. Neither willing to acquiesce to the other. Brown on brown. Deep pools, opaque and with immeasurable depth. Nothing conveyed concretely, but all you need to know about them revealed. Strength, and pride.

The Lieutenant knows Frank. Everyone knows Frank Pembleton. Say the name, and even before the crisp visual of the perfectly pressed, starched, and spit-shined cop leaps into mind, the mental and emotional reactions grip the person who hears the name uttered. Arrogant, stubborn, caustic. Close on the heels of those though come the ones that give him leeway, the cache that affords him to be so -unlikeable. Intelligent, dedicated, honest. No one likes Frank, but everyone respects him. Just not enough to bump him up into the position he longs for. Murder police.

He's lived and worked in this concrete jungle, watched it chew itself up year after year, listened to the shallow promises that he can make a difference. Year after year slipping away, while the proverbial carrot that he knows will jump start his life into high gear stays there, dangled in front of him, never quite attainable. He's pissed off. Pissed off at lots of things. Pissed off at a God that creates a need for his skills, pissed off a city and culture that won't let him fully utilize them in the highest calling. Pissed off at a society that keeps killing itself, instead of growing and learning; he sees it falling back, all of its morality slowly draining away. Pissed off that everything they try and do dam up the bloodflow merely makes it gush more, everything degenerating more and more rapidly. He's pissed off that people get pissed off about his incredible amount of pride.

He's paid his dues on these streets as a beat patrolman and proven himself more than capable with his investigative skills. All he wants is to be a homicide bull in the big city, to put down the \*\*meaningful\*\* cases. Instead he spends the better part of his life in this precinct questioning brain dead yos about crack motivated beatings and petty larcenies. And what's left of his time is spent trying to convince his wife of his stunted opportunities here, always degenerating and ending in the same caps to the argument. "Dammit Mary, this city won't let me do anything important," "Dammit, Frank, this city is our home."

So he waits, putting in the hours here, honing his skills on "lesser" crimes and biding his precious time until he eventually wears his wife down and he moves on to play in the big show elsewhere. And he will wear her down. Because no matter how determined, strong, and attached she is to her home, he's Frank Pembleton. He won't stop, he won't relent, and he won't ever give in. Not until he's the alpha dog speaking for the dead. That's what his life is for, and he's going to

do it. It's only a matter of time. It's a matter of pride. And he has the heart to do it, his way.

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Biding time is something Frank's current nemesis, Simon Adebisi, understands perfectly. He's been waiting every day for his life to begin. And he damn well straight is going to be able to mark exactly when that is. It's not something he tells anyone. He's too proud for that. It's not even something he dwells on. It's like that niggling little feeling that Frank has about needing to be murder police. It's like the strange feeling the Lieutenant has while watching these two. It can't be named, and it's not spoken or ever directly acknowledged. But it's a feeling of fate. Destiny. Or fulfillment maybe- or accomplishment? Excitement. He doesn't know what it is. He just knows he doesn't have it yet. It hasn't begun yet.

Like when he was still back in his fatherland, Nigeria. They kept promising. Soon, one day, shortly, the military government will be lifted and in its place a democratic society will take hold. Then a better life will start. They kept promising. Shallow and meaningless, never coming to fruition. The things that should have propelled them forward kept digging them deeper. Becoming a major oil exporter, instead of helping redistribute the wealth, it made the poor poorer, and the rich go into debt. As they started sucking more and more from of the resources from their precious land, it began to die. But instead of sacrificially giving itself up for the people in the traditional way they hoped, it kept dragging them right down with it. Sure, they abolished imperial rule, but were severely divided among tribes and cultures. Each too proud to concede power to another, they were easy picking for the military when it choose to steamroll them into submission.

He worked, first the land, then for the black gold. He waited for their promises of better, fairer days. But when elections were held and the military decided they didn't come out in a satisfactory manner and refused to release power, he had enough. So he left. He wanted more, he needed more. Wasting away in poverty under someone else's inflicted laws wasn't for him anymore. He had too much pride to rot away in that dying land. He was strong for sure. You had to be just to survive there. Everyone there knows that weak don't live. One in five male children die before they walk. He lived. He worked the land. With every spike of the hoe into the rapidly degenerating soil, his pride grew. Disdain for what he saw and lived and knew he'd rise out of fired his ambitions. But he never knew what they were of. Ambition to what? Leave, yes. Be better, yes.

Back in Nigeria, Simon'd sit back in the evening, chewing on a kona bean and let her powers ease his mind, cloud him in a blanket that made the indignity recede. Now he kicks back in his adopted home, snorting on white powders, still pushing that nagging feeling back, knowing he's stronger and better, proving his innate strength to people by force if necessary. No one makes him feel second class anymore. It still hasn't officially started, he's still watching the clock, biding his time until it does. But in the meantime, no one pushes Simon around anymore. He's not second class, and he'll prove that. It's only a matter of time. It's a matter of pride. And he has the heart to do it, his way.

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Seeing the battle of wills reach a nearly absurd level from the observation room, the Lieutenant knows he needs to intervene, get the "interview" on track lest these two men sit there staring at each other until one, or both, of their eyeballs dries out and falls on the table. Unwilling to complete the necessary paperwork should something like that occur, he steps around outside, then barges into the room, throwing the perp's file onto the table separating them. It has the desired result. They both break the gaze, looking first to him with annoyance for ending the game so early, then down at the intrusive folder that called the draw.

Reaching out, Pembleton flips the manilla folder open and scans its contents quickly, glancing a few times back up at the man seated across from him. Simon merely leans back, arms crossed, annoyed now at having to sit here across from this guy. Especially annoyed that he's sitting across from a guy that resembles himself.

Suddenly, the crisp man speaks. "You've been here for two years now, from," he pauses, tilting his head slightly to the side. "Nigeria." Flatly, looking at Adebisi directly now.

"I have been here five years, a citizen for two."

Frank already knew that, but he nods, acting as though this is important. Easing back now, a slight smile settling on his face, "You speak English very well," he compliments. It's a change-up, off speed pitch, throw him back on his heels early. Trying to soften him, it's not a lie though. Deep accent withstanding, it's one of the first things Frank noticed about him. He doesn't speak "street," he speaks textbook English.

He noticed a lot about Adebisi in those first five minutes when he got him into the squad car to bring him here. He watched him amble down the street with a half dazed marmaduke demeanor. He saw that evaporate as a macabre mojo coursed through Simon's veins when he made Frank. He noticed the rumpled clothing, one pant leg pulled up around his knee and a loose tank revealing a hyper-stoked physique. As usual, working without a partner, Frank was actually relieved when he didn't resist.

Simon doesn't take the bait of the dangled compliment. Instead, offended, he sucks through his teeth, refusing to answer it.

Frank presses. "Must have been difficult, coming here, new culture, new language."

Agitated now, he can't resist responding. "I speak Eenglish there." Dismissively, waving a hand absently, "Everyone does."

Knowing he's hit a nerve already, Frank changes tactics quickly. That's one of his gifts, knowing early which paths to take, when to adjust. Nodding at Adebisi's wrist, he speaks flatly, matter of factly, "You stole that watch."

"No."

"Yes you did."

"He gave eet to me."

"After you beat him, you stole it right off of him."

"No."

He's lying. Frank knows. The proper forms have already been signed, he's waived a lawyer's advice. That was simple. Adebisi has no use for little men in little suits, so he wouldn't have wanted one anyhow, it wasn't even a simple exercise for Frank's velvet tongue to get that far. And now he knows he's lying and guilty. Telltale signs. A six sentence exchange. But it told him everything. The way Adebisi's brow rose when he answered no the first time. The slight set of his jaw, glimmer of amusement when he lied about the guy giving it to him. He beat a man and stole his watch. He beat his employer after work and took his gold watch off of his wrist and left him there to bleed in his own diner.

He'll live. The guy, that is. This isn't a HOMICIDE. That's handled by other guys, not Frank. Just a simple beating and theft. Nick Lazerri got beaten and got his watch stolen, that's all. But he's going to get this confession anyhow. That's what he does.

Exposing two rows of perfect white teeth, Frank laughs out loud at the blatant lie. "You, you're wearing the evidence," drawing it out, enunciating perfectly, making it sound contemptible, "Adebeesee."

Shrugging, sucking through his teeth again, Adebisi doesn't speak.

"You think I'm stupid," Frank spits, slapping the folder down on the table. Rising, crossing his arms in front of his bold chest, succinctly. "Why do you think I'm stupid?"

"I don't."

"Yes, yes you do. Or you wouldn't sit here, LYING to me."

Turning, following Frank's moves around the room, Adebisi pins him in his sight. "You theenk you are better than me."

Amused again, brows raising, Frank's heard this one before. He knows exactly where it's going. He's had the race card thrown at him his entire life, but in his ten years on the force, he's come to realize and expect that it be thrown out at least bi-weekly. By becoming a cop, he knew and accepted that he was also becoming "the man." But he also knows how turn it to his advantage.

"I don't think I'm better. I know I'm different than you."

Sucking through his teeth, Adebisi regards him slowly. Nodding at the door, he answers. "We are thee same. They see you and me thee same."

"How so?"

"You run ahround, for them. You theenk you are better, you look down at me. But you - serve - them. You are their mon-keey."

"That's how he treated you, isn't it? Lazerri, like a monkey."

No reply.

Attacking again, "He, he ordered you around. HE acted better than you, didn't he?"

"You are no bettahr. They tell you what to do, ahnd you do eet. You think you will work," he spits the word out, "and move up. Be bettahr. But to them, you are a mon-keey. Mon-keey. We are no different, you - ahnd me."

Frustration bubbles up in Frank now.

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This should be easier. He should have talked by now. Marmaduke mojo motherfucker. Reaching an apex, he vents it, releasing the pressure by rubbing at his bare skull with one smooth hand. Three times precisely, he smoothes it over his scalp, then gestures to the seated man with the hand.

"So, he ordered you around, and you got sick of it. Did he, call you a monkey? Because I can see that. You're right. That's how they treat me around here too."

"We are no deeffferent. We, are strong. They, are afraid of thees."

"So, you SHOWED him you aren't a monkey, right?"

"I was finished, for thee day. Punched out." Tapping the watch on his wrist, he elaborates. "He knew what time I was fineeshed."

Now he's got it. Say the words, make him say the words is all. "So, you were done working for the day," Frank repeats, making it clear, lacing his voice with understanding. "And he told you to do something else."

"Yes."

"So you snapped. You, you showed him you aren't his monkey."

"I am not a monkeey."

"You showed him you're stronger, that he can't order you around."

"That's right. I stand up to heem, like you should," nodding out the door.

"You beat him and took his watch."

"I am not a monkeey, I am a liahn."

"You're going to do a five to ten for this you know."

"Do what you want, monkeey. You, they, can't hurt me. I have thee hahrt of a liahn."

"That," Frank pauses, snapping his tongue behind those perfect teeth.

Pointing one finger at Adebisi, "That is precisely the difference between us."

Tapping his own chest now, "I have the heart of a human."

End  
file.